

New species and breeding records for The Gambia

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A l'occasion de recherches sur le terrain, effectuées en 1999–2000 pour collecter des données sur la faune en Gambie, les auteurs ont identifié deux espèces nouvelles pour le pays: le Souimanga à ventre olive *Cinnyris chloropygia* et la Prinia aquatique *Prinia fluvialis*. La nidification de cette dernière en Gambie, ainsi que de l'Épervier shikra *Accipiter badius* et du Faucon de Cuvier *Falco cucullatus*, a été confirmée pour la première fois.

We have been based at the Research and Development Unit of the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management (DPWM) in The Gambia since March 1999. Part of our duties involves gathering baseline data on a range of taxa (including birds) throughout the country, especially within existing protected areas, including the 105 ha Abuko Nature Reserve and 4,940 ha Niimi National Park². Our duties also entail the rehabilitation of orphaned, injured and confiscated animals and birds into the wild. The following is a summary of new bird species and breeding records for The Gambia made during our field work.

In West Africa, Olive-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris chloropygia* occurs from Sénégal¹ and Sierra Leone to the Central African Republic, Gabon and Congo⁵. Rumsey & Rodwell⁴ list the species for Sénégal but not The Gambia, while Barlow *et al.*¹ state that, although unrecorded in The Gambia, it is found both to the north and south in Sénégal, and could therefore be expected to occur in forest thickets in Western Division. We observed an adult male Olive-bellied Sunbird in Abuko Nature Reserve, Western Division (03°21'N 16°39'W), on 12 December 1999. It was unmistakable, exhibiting all the key plumage characteristics of a male, including the bright metallic green upperparts, hood, chin and upper breast, dark brown flight feathers, yellow pectoral tufts, scarlet breast-band and olive belly^{1,5}. Abuko contains a small patch of remnant gallery forest surrounded by Guinea savanna. The bird was observed within the transition zone between the two habitats. This appears to be the first record of Olive-bellied Sunbird in The Gambia.

River Prinia *Prinia fluvialis* was first described from the Sénégal River valley in 1974 and closely resembles Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*¹. It has been recorded in Niger, Chad and Cameroon, with nests found in Sénégal and Guinea-Bissau¹. Rumsey & Rodwell⁴ do not list the species for The Gambia, but Barlow *et al.*¹ state that it is probably

present in the country. On 19 November 1999, we found an adult River Prinia incubating three warm, blue eggs in a nest on Jinack Island, on the north bank of the River Gambia, within Niimi National Park (13°24'N 16°39'W). The nest was located among dead plant stems and the living stems of an *Ipomoea* sp. 0.5 m above the surface of a flooded rice field. This habitat is consistent with known nesting sites of River Prinia¹, as is the colour of the eggs. Upon further searching we located another nest, only 5 m from the first, near the edge of the flooded area. The second nest was under construction and an adult River Prinia was observed carrying nest material to it. Both adults had much whiter underparts and greyer upperparts than Tawny-flanked Prinia¹. During a subsequent visit, on 11 December 1999, feather scale was discovered in the first nest, indicating that it had been successful. The second nest appeared to have failed without having been used. The failure was possibly caused by heavy rain, which had knocked the nest and the vegetation supporting it into the water. The habitat surrounding the large flooded rice field consisted of coastal scrub, predominantly Tamarisk *Tamarix senegalensis*. This appears to be the first record of River Prinia in The Gambia and the first breeding record in the country.

In West Africa, Shikra *Accipiter badius* is widespread and abundant⁵. In The Gambia it is considered a frequent to common year-round resident¹. Breeding has previously been suspected in the Western Division, in late October 1995, and sightings of immatures have been most frequent in the late rainy season (October/November)¹. We observed a pair throughout their breeding cycle in Abuko Nature Reserve, in April–June 1999. The nest was a thin platform of twigs, within a horizontal fork of a West African Laburnum *Cassia sieberiana*, at a height of 13 m. The pair was first observed during copulation and early nest-building on 6 April. By 3 May the nest was complete and the adult female was observed on the nest several times in May and early June. On 15 June

three chicks were present in the nest, being fed by an adult. Finally, on 29 June, one in juvenile plumage was perched by the nest calling to an adult, which responded from a tree c50 m distant. No other young were seen or heard on this occasion. Our observation constitutes the first confirmed breeding of Shikra in The Gambia.

In West Africa, African Hobby *Falco cuvieri* occurs within the savanna zone of Sénégal and The Gambia east to the Central African Republic and south to Congo⁵. In The Gambia it is frequent, with year-round records from all administrative divisions¹. Breeding has not been recorded in the country though it has been suspected¹. A young juvenile African Hobby was discovered being kept as a pet near the Methodist Mission in Brikama, Western Division (13°16'N 16°39'W), during May 2000. As the keeping of wild animals as pets (including birds), contravenes the Wildlife Conservation Act (1977)³ it was subsequently confiscated and brought to the DPWM headquarters for rehabilitation into the wild. According to the erstwhile owners, it was taken, as a chick, from a nest on the outskirts of Brikama. This appears to be the first confirmed breeding in The Gambia.

Record cards for the above nests have been deposited with the Nest Record Scheme of the British Trust for Ornithology in the UK.

Acknowledgement

Clive Barlow confirmed the identification of the juvenile Shikra in Abuko. ?

References

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